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### **NEW STRATEGY PROPOSED TO REDUCE SHIP COLLISIONS WITH ENDANGERED NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) today proposed a comprehensive strategy for reducing collisions between ocean-going vessels and highly endangered North Atlantic right whales along the East Coast. The strategy includes measures tailored to vessel traffic patterns, ocean conditions, and right whale behavior during times and in areas where collision risk is high. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Public comments will be accepted for sixty days, during which time the Agency will also conduct public meetings to discuss the strategy. Comments will be considered as the agency completes environmental and economic analyses required to develop the final strategy and rules to implement it.

We believe the strategy proposed today can make U.S. waters safer for right whales, said Bill Hogarth, Director of NOAA Fisheries. Vessel strikes are a leading human-caused threat to these rare whales, and we have worked closely with maritime commerce professionals to devise this strategy.

The proposed strategy relies on a combination of routing and speed options, narrowly defined (in time and area) by right whale presence, and tailored to conditions in each of three major regions along the East Coast (mid Atlantic ports, southeast ports and northeast). The proposed measures are adapted to each area's likely right whale seasonal occurrence, commercial ship traffic patterns and navigational concerns. The strategy also recommends continuing support for existing protective actions, expanded education and outreach initiatives.

For example, in the northeast U.S., management measures are being considered for Cape Cod Bay, an area off Race Point, the Great South Channel, and in the Gulf of Maine, all areas where right whales concentrate to feed. With further development, these measures may include routing changes to reduce the overlap between the ships and whales and/or speed reduction to give both animals and mariners additional time to take avoidance action.

For mid-Atlantic ports along right whales migratory pathway, vessel speed restrictions are proposed. For the southeast ports that overlap with right whale calving grounds (Jacksonville, Fernandina, and Brunswick) traffic lanes may be established and subject to speed restrictions.

Measures as proposed would apply to both domestic and international vessels in U.S. waters, 65 ft and longer. Sovereign immune vessels (such as U.S. military and government research vessels) would be exempt from these measures, but can voluntarily comply. To fully implement, the strategy will require both federal regulations and rules negotiated through the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

We've been successful with IMO in the past on right whale issues and look forward to making our case for this strategy. We believe that revised traffic rules can really make a difference for these whales, said Hogarth.

NOAA Fisheries conducts a multi-front effort aimed at reducing human-caused injuries and deaths among North Atlantic right whales. The Agency presently conducts aerial surveys to notify mariners of right whale sighting locations, operates the mandatory ship reporting systems to provide right whale locations to mariners entering right whale habitat, and supports regional Recovery Plan Implementation Teams that provide recommendations to NOAA Fisheries on recovery activities. The strategy proposed today will add to these efforts.

The comment period will be open from June 1, 2004 to August 2, 2004. Send public comments to: Chief, Marine Mammal Conservation Division, Attn: Right Whale Ship Strike Strategy, Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Comments may also be sent via email to [shipstrike.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:shipstrike.comments@noaa.gov) or to the Federal Rulemaking portal: <http://www.regulations.gov> (follow instructions for submitting comments). In addition, NOAA Fisheries plans to hold multiple public meetings in Northeast, mid-Atlantic and southeast U.S. ports to present the strategy and solicit comment throughout summer 2004. Dates, times, and locations will be published in a forthcoming *Federal Register* notice.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to providing and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

More Info: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/trt/shipstrike/index.htm>

